

ARTYKUŁY I ROZPRAWY

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THE OVERSEAS CONTACTS OF THE ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND. A REASSESSMENT

This article examines the main directions of contact of the Anglo-Saxon world and the question of English ports, the *emporía*. Together they form the basis of early Anglo-Saxon interpretation of the British Isles' pattern of contact.

The question of *emporía* (but not necessarily the *emporía* themselves as it will be discussed in the last section) is important here, because as entities they formed the gates of trade system of the Anglo-Saxon England in the given period. As such they were also the windows to the world and helped in establishing new contacts and maintaining the old ones.

The North

Scandinavia and the Baltic

The North as understood here spans through quite a large region, including Ireland, Scandinavia and the Baltic. The contacts of the Anglo-Saxons with those regions were also specific in nature – trade mingles here with exploration and even with 'adventure', however rare this term might be in the historiographical discourse. But what those regions have in common is not only their geographical locale but also the clearly maritime character of contact, where shipping served not as an intermediary but as the main way of traveling.

The contacts of the Anglo-Saxons with Scandinavia clearly fall in two main chronological periods: before and after the Viking invasions of the 8th century.

But not surprisingly, the contacts before the Vikings were also vivid and intense.

Anglo-Saxons have come to England by sea from northern Germany and southern Denmark. Thus the road to the North-East was a natural way of contact, forming a kind of ‘ancestral highway’ for the early settlers. The nature of this migration is a lengthy subject¹. What matters is that those travels were made by sea, probably through coastal sailing and the migrants were at the very beginning small in number, thus initially keeping close contacts with their homeland.

A second wave of immigration has been suggested based on a careful examination of artefacts found in East Anglia and Humberside. It recreated anew the contacts with Scandinavia in the late 6th century, this time with southern Norway². Those contacts might be the seeds of the pattern of contact dominating through much of the existence of the Anglo-Saxon period. Parallels have been drawn between the settlements, state-formation and even agriculture in East Anglia and southern Norway, further implying some kind of maritime contact between those two regions.

The grave goods found in the ship burials, including Sutton Hoo mounds, seem to uphold this hypothesis. Some far-reaching comparisons with finds as far as Finland were drawn³. The Sutton Hoo helmet has been compared with similar pieces found in Sweden on the cemeteries in Vendel and Valsgärde⁴. Although at least some aspects of the ‘Scandinavian connection’ have been put into question and some historians were very vary in interpreting them⁵ it is difficult to ignore striking style similarities. They might in turn point to at least awareness and maybe full-scale contact, even if intermediaries played a large role here. Anglo-Saxon England might have, at the time, played the role of an intermediary between the Continent and southern Scandinavia⁶. If so it would be another proof that the pattern of contact was constant and did not stop to evolve and expand after the Roman withdrawal.

Those finds and cultural resemblances fit the picture even better when we look into the technology used by the peoples living around the North Sea before the Vikings and the use they made of it. The archaeological findings of

¹ For an insightful and interesting view of those migrations look: M.E. Jones, *The End of Roman Britain*, New York 1998.

² M.O.H. Carver, *Pre-Viking traffic in the North Sea*, in: *Maritime Celts, Frisians and Saxons*, ed. S. McGrail, London 1990, p. 117.

³ A. Erä-Esko, *Sutton Hoo and Finland*, “Speculum” 1953, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Jul.), p. 514–515.

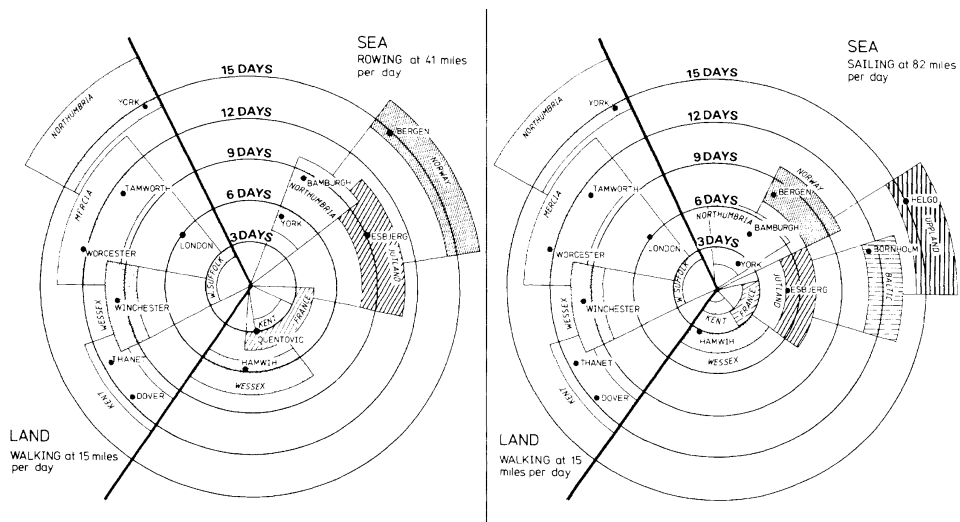
⁴ R.L.S. Bruce-Mitford, *Aspects of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology: Sutton Hoo and other Discoveries*, London 1974, p. 210–216.

⁵ Including such authorities like Peter Hunter Blair, look: P. Hunter Blair, *Roman Britain and Early England 55 B.C.-A.D. 871*, London 1966, p. 26–27.

⁶ H. Jankuhn, *Trade and Settlement in Central and Northern Europe up to and during the Viking Period*, “The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland” 1982, Vol. 112, No. 18–50, p. 23.

the early ships from Denmark show that, at least at the beginning, most of the traffic was done by rowing. Rowing forced the early sailors to navigate by the coastline and stop on a beach for the night during their travels. But during the 5th and 6th centuries there is a steady increase in traffic on the North Sea, which might in turn be connected with some developments in sailing technology⁷.

Certainly those constraints did not influence negatively the abilities of the early medieval sailors to cross the North Sea. Actually their technique might have been severely underappreciated and the result of 'Viking revolution' was not a breakthrough in technology but rather in mastering and perfecting the technique used for years before⁸.



Ill. 1. The diagrams showing distances and times of travel in the North Sea basin

Source: M.O.H. Carver, 'Pre-Viking traffic in the North Sea' in *Maritime Celts, Frisians and Saxons*, ed. S. McGrail, London 1990.

A close look on the diagram showing the distances on the North Sea and the time needed to cross them shows that it was not a gigantic and impossible endeavour. Bergen in southern Norway is accessible in 15 day by rowing and in 9 by sail. These are by no means distances unfathomable for the sailors who had at their disposal ships like those found in Nydam. Actually the tides and winds helped in the maritime traffic between England and

⁷ O. Crumlin-Petersen, *Boats and Ships of the Angles and Jutes*, in: *Maritime Celts, Frisians and Saxons*, ed. S. McGrail, London 1990, p. 113–114. The question of the existence of sails on the boats of the migrant Anglo-Saxons has spurred quite a discussion, look: M.E. Jones, *The literary evidence for mast and sail during the Anglo-Saxon invasions*, "Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History" 1992, Vol. 13, p. 31–67.

⁸ M.O.H. Carver, *Pre-Viking traffic in the North Sea*, in: *Maritime Celts*, p. 122.

Norway. Also in this perspective Ipswich in East Anglia is closer to Quentovic by sea on the Continent than it is to Mercia by land. This should give us some idea as to the patterns of contact – what is today thought as difficult to access and therefore unlikely to form a part of recurring contacts, might have indeed been closer than we think.

When discussing the North and the Baltic almost immediately we think about two English (or *presumably* English, depending on the definition of Englishness that we follow) explorers, namely Wulfstan and Ohthere. Including them will slightly violate the chronological scope of this work but without them even an attempt to describe the patterns of contact will be incomplete. One can say that their voyages were the products of long tradition and did not originate in a chronological isolation – they were results of lasting legacy. Both journeys were undertaken around the 880s and 890s and both accounts are included in the king Alfred's version of Orosius. This Old English translation is essential for anybody trying to understand the scope of geographical knowledge of the Anglo-Saxons as it was at the end of the 9th century. Much attention has been devoted to discern what were the lands described in both accounts and what were the farthest points the adventurers reached.

In the opening passages of his account Ohthere writes that he comes from the northernmost Norse settlement, which was probably Malangen area near Troms. He has travelled as far as the White Sea and to a land, which he called Bjarmaland. He has also described a land or a tribe, which he called *Cwenas*, whose identity has spurred an interesting academic discussion⁹.

Wulfhere, on the other hand, headed East and he reached the Prussian emporium of Truso. His voyage, although much shorter, is no less significant. He started his voyage in what is believed to be Hedeby. In the record an Old English form is used which appears to be native and not translated¹⁰. Thus, existence of linguistic evidence might reflect an important trade route known long before to English. The question did the English also frequent Truso is of course open to discussion. The true importance of those voyages and their accounts is that they were included in a written record and, moreover, in a record written in vernacular Old English, thus opening them to a wider reception. Especially the account of Ohthere's travels seems to include information important to future sailors wanting to go on his route

⁹ Look: A.S.C. Ross, *Cwenas and Lakes*, "The Geographical Journal" 1954, Vol. 120, No. 3, (Sep.), p. 337–345 and do not fail to look at a lovely short piece of an old-fashioned historical discussion, which is a delight to read on itself, if only for an almost bucolic understanding of the early medieval economy; certainly a no-miss: J.M. Wordie, E.O.G. Turville-Petre, M.J. Wise, Miss Daunt, Alan S.C. Ross, Lord Rennell, 'Ohthere's „Cwenas and Lakes”: Discussion', "The Geographical Journal" 1954, Vol. 120, No. 3, (Sep.), p. 345–346.

¹⁰ K. Malone, 'On Wulfstan's Scandinavia', *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (Oct. 1931), 574–579, p. 574–575.

and could even be a precise itinerary¹¹. So, although we cannot pinpoint in the sources any attempt at recreating their voyages, they have certainly contributed to the creation of a pattern of contact.

Ireland

It is problematic to include Ireland in the ‘outside world’, yet the importance of this island to the Anglo-Saxon sphere merits at least a glance of its place in the pattern of contact.

Shipbuilding and maritime travel was probably well developed in Ireland from quite early on. The accounts like *Navigatio* of St. Brendan show, that the technology was flourishing enough to undertake ocean voyages and establishing even far-reaching contacts¹². The Irish missionaries have reached the Continent and Britain well before the Vikings.

The system of foreign exchange was probably based on a couple of high-status communities, which included Clogher and Garranes, and through which the goods were further redistributed to the less important settlements¹³. The distribution of some types of pottery like the E-ware, shows that the trade with Britain was mainly conducted with the Celtic communities in Wales, Cornwall and Scotland¹⁴. Those communities might have acted as intermediaries in redistributing material in England.

But trade does not fully explain the role of Ireland in the pattern of contact. The island has contributed to it chiefly through its missionary activity, serving as the source of Christianity and learning to the northern kingdoms of England. In that capacity it was very much present in the common consciousness of the Anglo-Saxons.

The Continent

Gaul

The travels of Benedict Biscop serve as an almost ideal example of the contacts with both the Continent in general and Rome in particular. Not only did they provide various artefacts and books (more on this subject in the part of the article devoted specifically to Rome) but also through a kind of ‘recruiting’ action brought to England people and materials, which were never seen before:

After the interval of a year, Benedict crossed the sea into Gaul, and no sooner asked than he obtained and carried back with him some masons to build him a church in the Roman style, which he had always admired. So much zeal did he show from his love to Saint Peter, in whose honour he was building it, that

¹¹ W. C. Stokoe, *On Ohthere's Steorbord*, “Speculum” 1957, Vol. 32, No. 2, (Apr.), p. 302.

¹² M. Blackwell, *Ships in Early Irish History*, Clare 1992, p. 21.

¹³ M. Comber, *Trade and Communication Networks in Early Historic Ireland*, “The Journal of Irish Archaeology” 2001, Vol. 10, p. 87.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 88.

within a year from the time of laying the foundation, you might have seen the roof on and the solemnity of the mass celebrated therein. When the work was drawing to completion, he sent messengers to Gaul to fetch makers of glass, (more properly artificers,) who were at this time unknown in Britain, that they might glaze the windows of his church, with the cloisters and dining-rooms. This was done, and they came, and not only finished the work required, but taught the English nation their handicraft, which was well adapted for enclosing the lanterns of the church, and for the vessels required for various uses. All other things necessary for the service of the church and the altar, the sacred vessels, and the vestments, because they could not be procured in England, he took especial care to buy and bring home from foreign parts.¹⁵

Should this fragment fall in ‘the Continent’ or rather Rome part of the article? Although the church at Wearmouth-Jarrow was build in a close resemblance to Santa Maria in Cosmedin in Rome, the masons and materials were acquired in Francia and the church was supposed to imitate the general, tradition of Western Christianity¹⁶.

The exchange was not one-sided; England did not only take from the Continent. Let us give another interesting example: in 770 bishop of Mainz Lullus tried to acquire a copy of ‘*liber cosmografiorum*’ from York, which was probably a copy of Orosius¹⁷.

With the advent of the ‘age of emporia’ the North Sea and trans-Channel traffic has experienced a real boom. By the 8th century the maritime exchange in this area has been greater then in the Mediterranean at the same time¹⁸. It has profound consequences for our understanding of the pattern of contact of not only Anglo-Saxon England but the whole zone of exchange dominated by the emporia.

The main port on the continental side of the Channel was Quentovic and because of its vivid and manifold links with England it will serve as an excellent example. Although Frisian in origin it clearly had a more cosmopolitan character and quickly fell into Frankish influence.

Bede writes:

When King Egbert had been told, that a bishop, the one they had asked for from the bishop of Rome, was in the kingdom of the Franks, he at once sent his reeve named Raedfrith to bring Theodore to him. When Raedfrith arrived, he took Theodore with the permission of Ebroin and brought him to the port called Quentovic. Here he was delayed for some time owing to sickness, but when he had begun to recover, he sailed to Britain.¹⁹

¹⁵ Bede, *The Lives of The Holy Abbots of Weremouth and Jarrow*, in: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/bede-jarrow.html> [20.04.2013].

¹⁶ J. O’Reilly, *The Art of Authority*, in: *After Rome*, ed. T. Charles-Edwards, Oxford 2003, p. 145.

¹⁷ W. Levinson, *England and the Continent in the Eight Century*, Oxford 1946, p. 42.

¹⁸ C. Wickham, *The inheritance of Rome. A history of Europe from 400 to 1000*, London 2009, p. 230.

¹⁹ Bede, IV, 1.

Here Quentovic served as an entry port to southern Britain and it must have been chosen with care, because Theodore was an important person, escorted by a king's official.

The archaeological finds from the site at Étapes-sur-Mer, where the emporium was placed, show that the contacts with Britain were indeed intensive. There are pottery deposits showing striking similarities with findings at Hamwic (modern day Southampton), potash glass from England and an 8th century *sceatta* coin²⁰. Overall, findings connected with the British Islands constitute a large part. This proves that this settlement might be treated as one of the main gates to the Continent for England.

The picture becomes even clearer when we look at the political situation at the time. As Ian Wood showed, the Merovingian kings of Francia perceived south-eastern England (mainly Kent) as part of their dominions. In nearly all fields: culture, political over-lordship, Christianisation and later Church organisation the Merovingian lords tried to exercise their power. They also made serious attempts to uphold their claims on the diplomatic field²¹.

The abovementioned fragment of Bede supports this thesis – the king's reeve had to ask permission of Ebroin, the Neustrian mayor of the palace, before he could proceed with his mission. From such perspective Gaul and the Channel ports change their place in the Anglo-Saxon pattern of contact – such a close link places them within the inner core.

In Quentovic English merchants were gaining access to a wide trade network, in which, during the Merovingian times, Gaul was only an intermediary and which might have included Byzantium and Middle East²². In that case its importance is profound – serving as a gateway it would have opened the other zones for the English. And it also serves as an example of continuity of contact – the site of Quentovic was a place of trading and industrial exchange with England probably also during the Roman times²³.

Frisians

The Frisians became the successors of the great 'trunk' trade route from northern Italy over the Alps and down the Rhine to Frisia and Britain as it was traced by surveying the findings of the golden solidi from the 7th century²⁴. The initial survey of contacts between the Frisians and Anglo-Saxon

²⁰ D. Hill, D. Barrett, K. Maude, J. Warburton and M. Worthington, *Quentovic Defined*, "Antiquity" 1990, Vol. 64, p. 55–57.

²¹ I. Wood, *The Channel from the 4th to the 7th centuries A.D.*, in: *Maritime Celts, Frisians and Saxons*, ed. S. McGrail, London 1990, p. 97.

²² P.J. Greary, *Before France and Germany. The Creation and Transformation of the Merovingian World*, Oxford 1988, p. 102–103.

²³ D. Hill et al., op. cit., p. 51.

²⁴ H.L. Adelson, *Early Medieval Trade Routes*, "The American Historical Review" 1960, Vol. 65, p. 272.

was difficult at the beginning, because of the apparent similarities between the material cultures of both²⁵. But an exchange between both cultures has been pinpointed and supported precisely during the research of the material culture – stylistic similarities between fibulae and brooches found in Britain and in the mouth of the Rhine, findings of exquisite Kentish jewelry in Frisia. All this shows that the continuity of trade at this route has been preserved and that Frisians were the main agents of it²⁶.

Their importance was so big, that their trading position has been already described as a monopoly. Their trading activities with England were made through a series of landing places, of which Dorestad looks to be the most important. Those landing and trading places have evolved around *terpen* – small hills which were not overtaken by water during floods. The main role of Frisians was that of the distributors – the goods transported down the Rhine were packed on coastal ships bound to England or Scandinavia. Their key geographical locale was also the key to their success²⁷.

Dorestad served also as an important intermediary with the Baltic, as it specialised in Eastern European goods and merchants from this emporium monopolised the trade with Birka for some time²⁸. As such it opened new possibilities of imports and, before the advent of the Vikings, served as virtually the most important gate to the East.

The Frisians, similar culturally and important economically, have spurred a reciprocal move by the Anglo-Saxons expressed in their attempts to Christianise them. Wilfrid undertook the first mission in 677 on his way to Rome, but it did not leave any lasting effects. Whether he wanted to go to the Frisians or was taken there by the treacherous winds is a question of interpretation of the sources²⁹. But the contacts were so frequent and so vivid, that the attempts were made again and again by Wihthberht and later by Willibrord who, thanks to good political circumstances on the Continent, finally succeeded and established a see in Wijk bin Duurstede – that is Dorestad³⁰. His success might have been due to the perception of Anglo-Saxons as not hostile and not politically dangerous compared to the Franks³¹. Those attempts later fruited in a movement, in which Anglo-Saxons established many more missions in the continental Europe, especially in Germany.

Overall the size of the early medieval trade exchange across the Channel was probably impressive. The estimates of the number of coins struck during

²⁵ D. Jellema, *Frisian Trade in the Dark Ages*, "Speculum", Vol. 30, p. 18.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ D. Ellmers, *The Frisian monopoly of coastal transport in the 6th-8th centuries A.D.*, in: *Maritime Celts, Frisians and Saxons*, London 1990, p. 91–92.

²⁸ O. Pritsak, *The Origin of Rus'*, "Russian Review" 1977, Vol. 36, No. 3, (Jul.), p. 265.

²⁹ J. Strzelczyk, *Iroszkoci w kulturze średniowiecznej Europy*, Warszawa 1987, p. 83.

³⁰ F.M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, Oxford 2001, p. 166.

³¹ J. Strzelczyk, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

the reign of Offa (757–796) show figures as high as 6.7 million³². If only a portion of this number (and as archaeology shows the Channel trade was one of the most important directions) was devoted to the Rhenish area and Gaul it would be an example of immense prosperity towards the end of our chronological scope. A dual axis of cross-Channel trade existed, one leading from London and the Kentish ports of Fordwich, Sarre and Minster-in-Thanet to Dorestad and the other from Hamwich to Quentovic and Rouen³³. The foreign trade clearly constituted the main source of the wealth of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms³⁴. Thus it is a vivid and important proof that the pattern of contacts and its continuity was essential for the very existence of the Anglo-Saxons – the political, cultural and economic interests relied on sustaining this pattern.

Map. 1. The ‘dual axis’ of trade

Source: Own work.

³² D.M. Metcalf, *The Prosperity of North-West Europe in the 8th and 9th Centuries*, “Economic History Review” 1967, Vol. 20, p. 357.

³³ J.R. Maddicott, *Trade, Industry and the Wealth of King Alfred*, “Past and Present” 1989, Vol. 123, p. 7.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

‘The Overseas’

Byzantium

Krijnie Ciggaar, who examined the contacts between the Byzantine Empire and England during the reign of Edward the Confessor, stated in his introduction that ‘The reader, however, will be offered more questions than answers, more suggestions than conclusions. I hope that historians, art historians, archaeologists and other people interested may be stimulated to keep an eye open for anything that may contribute to a better understanding of the relations between East and West in the period mentioned’³⁵. This is the best summary of any research made into those relations. Every finding, every element that is a proof of some kind of contact is more of a riddle than an answer.

One should probably begin with the Byzantine findings from the Sutton Hoo ship burials, preserved in the British Museum. The silverware found there were certainly items treated as high-status and thought of as extremely valuable. The bowls, spoons and plates bear clear Christian symbols and some are even inscribed in Greek³⁶. How those items came to England is of course unclear, but it is highly unlikely that they were brought straight from Byzantium. Also, given their high status they were probably not traded – they could have been gift items, which seem to be the most plausible explanation.

There are three turning points in the Byzantine-Anglo-Saxon contacts. One is the arrival of archbishop Theodore, native of Tarsus, who has introduced Greek teaching and eastern theological thought to England. The other is the period of Viking invasions, when the eastern trade routes became more accessible and more and more Byzantine artefacts and currency flowed to England. And the third one is the period of the reorganisation of the Byzantine army at the turn of 10th and 11th centuries, when larger groups of Anglo-Saxons begin to serve in the Varangian Guard³⁷.

Theodore’s mission to England had a profound impact. The school he has established in Canterbury must have opened the English Church for new ideas. Bede is constantly praising Theodore’s times³⁸. Certainly the period of his reign at Canterbury must have made a lasting mark on Anglo-Saxon England. In the description of archbishop’s arrival to England, which has been already quoted in connection with Quentovic, we find an interesting clue, connected with Theodore’s associate who travelled with him, named Hadrian:

³⁵ K. Ciggaar, *England and Byzantium*, “Anglo-Norman Studies” 1983, Vol. 5, p. 78.

³⁶ For a thorough description of those items look: R.L.S. Bruce-Mitford et al., *The Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial*, Vol. 3, p. II, London 1983, p. 69–146.

³⁷ J. Bonarek, *Anglosasi w służbie Komnenów. Zarys problemu*, in: *Per saecula. Dyplomacja – gospodarka – historiografia. Studia ofiarowane Profesorowi Edwardowi Alfredowi Mierzwie*, ed. A. Korytko, B. Krzysztopa-Czupryńska, Olsztyn-Piotrków Trybunalski 2008, p. 9–10.

³⁸ Bede, IV, 2.

Ebroin kept Hadrian because he suspected him of having some mission from the emperor to the kings of Britain, which might be directed against the kingdom over which at that time he held the chief charge. But when he discovered the truth, that Hadrian had never any such mission at any time, he freed him and allowed him to go after Theodore.³⁹

Although it must be treated as a pure hypothesis the fear of the mayor of the palace that this Hadrian might have some kind of diplomatic mission from Byzantium is perplexing. This fragment spurs many questions: why does he stop him and not Theodore? Why he thinks that the emperor might be interested in an alliance with the English kingdoms against his rule? Were there similar attempts made in the past? Or is this just an example of Merovingian paranoia in full blossom? Unfortunately we do not have answers to those questions.



Ill. 3. The 'folded cross' from the Staffordshire Hoard

Source: <http://www.staffordshirehoard.org.uk/staritems/the-folded-cross> [20.05.2013].

The indirectness of the early contacts with Byzantium is evident, they are extremely difficult to trace – probably the most effective way is to look at stylistic and artistic similarities. And these are numerous. One of the most interesting is maybe the tree of life motif, traced in the early northern Anglo-Saxon art⁴⁰. The recently found Staffordshire Hoard features a folded cross, which might represent it⁴¹. Further comparisons have been drawn with items found in the treasury of St. Cuthbert with some of them of clear

³⁹ Bede, IV, 1.

⁴⁰ S. Casson, *Byzantium and Anglo-Saxon Sculpture-I*, "The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs" 1932, Vol. 61, No. 357 (Dec.), p. 267.

⁴¹ The hypotheses made on the Staffordshire Hoard interpretations, which is still in the evaluation and conservation process at the time of writing [2011], are made by the author as based on the first-hand examination of the finds during the preliminary showings of the hoard in Birmingham before the Hoard was removed for conservation.

Byzantine provenience, probably brought to England by pilgrims who visited Holy Land⁴². Later on, during the 10th and 11th centuries, those stylistic similarities can be seen as a developed artistic style⁴³.

All in all Byzantium was well established in the Anglo-Saxon pattern of contact. The lack of overwhelming material evidence can be explained by the high value of the items imported from the East and by the apparent multitude of intermediaries. But for example in the case of silk the volume of exchange might have been quite considerable. The situation changes greatly just after the chronological period of this work – the Vikings and presence of Anglo-Saxons at the Byzantine payroll have revived the contacts and probably removed at least some of the intermediaries.

Rome

There is some difficulty in assessing, whether Rome should be really included in ‘the Overseas’ part of this article. Nicholas Howe has named Rome ‘the Capital of Anglo-Saxon England’⁴⁴ and although his statement might be a bit of an exaggeration, nevertheless the chief city of Christendom seemed not to be very remote for the Anglo-Saxons.

The importance of Rome lies not in being a trade partner. It seems highly unlikely, that any direct trade contacts were kept with the city on regular basis. Of course this does not take into account the artefacts, books and other thing brought from the holy city by pilgrims, travellers and messengers.

There are numerous mentions of various journeys and travels to Rome in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, some of which will be examined in detail later on. In this article, happily for any historian, sources may speak freely – Rome deserved numerous mentions in the Anglo-Saxon texts and therefore it appears in a variety of situations. Therefore out of necessity only some ‘illustrations’ can be made here, as the constraints of the size of this work do not permit us to elaborate on just the most important issues. Lets begin with a slightly different account, namely that of a situation when a journey was *not* made:

889. This year no journey was made to Rome, [except] by two couriers whom king Alfred sent two messengers with letters.⁴⁵

The absence of any significant travellers on their way to Rome in this year, except some routine correspondence, seemed so important for the scri-

⁴² S. Casson, op. cit., p. 268.

⁴³ S. Casson, *Byzantium and Anglo-Saxon Sculpture-II*, “The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs” 1933, Vol. 62, No. 358 (Jan.), p. 35.

⁴⁴ N. Howe, *Rome, Capital of the Anglo-Saxon England*, “Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies” 2004, Vol. 34, p. 147–172.

⁴⁵ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, s. a. 889, in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, trans. and ed. Michael Swanton, New York: Routledge 1998.

be, that he found it necessary to record. He did not write down any other events from that year. This shows how frequent were the contacts between England and Rome at the time, those of high-level political status and ecclesiastical nature are recorded in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and the works of Bede. And it is Bede who records the very first official ecclesiastical delegation sent from England to Rome, by archbishop Augustine at the very beginning of his mission to the island:

He [Augustine] returned to Britain [from a synod in Arles] and at once sent to Rome the priest Laurence and the monk Peter to inform the pope St Gregory that the English race had received the faith of Christ and that he himself had been made their bishop.⁴⁶

This was just a beginning of a long sequence of royal, ecclesiastical and private visits to the holy city. Let us again give voice to the sources, when kings Oswiu and Egbert decided to send a priest to Rome:

667. In this year Oswy and Egbert sent Wigheard the priest to Rome to be consecrated archbishop, but he passed away as soon as he arrived there.⁴⁷

Bede duly adds to this short information:

[...] Oswiu of Northumbria and Egbert of Kent, consulted together as to what ought to be done about the state of the English Church; for Oswiu, although educated by the Irish, clearly realized that the Roman Church was both catholic and apostolic; so with the choice and consent of the holy Church of the English people, they took a priest named Wigheard [...] and sent him to Rome to be consecrated bishop [...]. Wigheard duly reached Rome but died before he could be consecrated;⁴⁸

Putting aside the Bede's rather nasty and only slightly hidden remark showing his almost usual animosity towards the Celtic Christianity the fragment seems to uphold the thesis that Rome was indeed treated as a source of power and legitimacy. With such qualities bestowed it must have served as one of the focal points of the pattern of contact. Howe draws similarities between his treating of Rome as the capital of the Anglo-Saxon England and Walter Benjamin's understanding of Paris as 'the capital of the 19th century' and draws a list of features that justify this comparison, mainly focusing on cultural importance⁴⁹. To all that he writes it is indeed tempting to add another feature: that of a gate.

Rome served not only as a legitimising and power-giving centre, this metaphorical capital, but also as the gate of the Anglo-Saxon England. One was entering into this England through Rome from the 'outside' world and through Rome one was leaving it. Archbishop Theodore came to England

⁴⁶ Bede, I, 17.

⁴⁷ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, s. a. 667.

⁴⁸ Bede, III, 29.

⁴⁹ N. Howe, op. cit., p. 156–158.

from Tarsus through Rome – it is highly unlikely that without the passing through this ‘gateway’ anyone from so far away would rise into a mention in the sources of Anglo-Saxon England. This England had even a physical presence in its ‘transcendental’ capital:

816. In this year pope Stephen passed away, and after him Paschal was consecrated pope. And in the same year ‘the School of the English’ was burnt down.⁵⁰

This ‘School of the English’ consisted of a whole complex dedicated to help the pilgrims, centred around the church of St Mary and sporting a hostel for pilgrims⁵¹. This district was in fact ‘a little England’ – the *Vita Paschalis* records, that the Englishmen had named it a ‘burh’ – *burgus* in Latin⁵². This establishment was founded probably in the eight century and was quickly rebuild from the fire damages by the pope Paschal⁵³.

The ‘schola’ served also as a place of burial of at least one English king, Burhred of Mercia, who died during his stay, or rather ‘political retirement’:

874. [...] And he [Burhred] went to Rome and there resided, and his body lies in St Mary’s church in ‘the School of the English’.⁵⁴

Vikings drove Burhred out of his kingdom – so his journey to Rome for a ‘political retirement’ was not only a sign of Christian devotion but also a logical consequence of treating Rome as the legitimising centre of his own power in his capacity as a king.

The pilgrims constitute probably the silent majority of travellers to Rome. The passage was by no means a safe one and it was clearly not easy to afford to go there. The English authorities understood it early on. When the king Wulfhere of Mercia has endowed the monastery of Peterborough (*Medeshamstede* in Old English) he has in one passage underlined both this fact and the authority of Rome:

656. [...] Thus I desire to free this monastery so that it be subject only to Rome; and I desire that all of us who cannot go to Rome come to visit St Peter here.⁵⁵

This legitimising power of Rome is further underlined in a next passage from the same year:

[...] When this matter was brought to a conclusion, the king sent to Rome to Vitalian, who was then pope, and desired that he would grant with his bull and with his blessing all the proceedings aforesaid. And the pope sent his bull, saying thus: I, pope Vitalian, grant to you, king Wulfhere, and to the archbishop Deusdedit and to the abbot Seaxwulf all the things which you ask, and I forbid

⁵⁰ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, s. a. 816.

⁵¹ D. Whitelock, *The Beginnings of English Society*, London 1952, p. 175.

⁵² W. Levinson, op. cit., p. 41. He speculates, that the modern name of *Borgo Santo Spirito* might be indeed derived from the Old English ‘burh’.

⁵³ N. Howe, op. cit., p. 147–148.

⁵⁴ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, s. a. 874.

⁵⁵ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, s. a. 656.

any king or any man to have any authority there except the abbot alone, and that he obey no man except the pope of Rome and the archbishop of Canterbury.⁵⁶

The relative ease at which Wulfhere sends this mission to Rome is a confirmation that such endeavours were not seen as something extraordinary. It is also worth mentioning that the pope was not asked and did not grant powers to the king – he was merely sent to acknowledge his, papal, authority.

Yet the visits to Rome were not only made with intention to go to the holy sites. One notable example of a full-scale expedition made to Rome was that of Benedict Biscop. He has visited the holy city at least five times. The first two voyages were more spiritual in character, but on the third, fourth and fifth he has acquired a large quantity of not only books but also ‘Some decorations and muniments there were which could not be procured even in Gaul, and these the pious founder determined to fetch from Rome’⁵⁷. He has also brought from Rome a singer named John in order to teach the English the Gregorian chant. But his main focus when visiting Rome was the construction of his library. And by library he understood not only books but also pictures, showing events from the Bible, which he hung in the church:

[...] [Benedict] accomplished a third voyage from Britain to Rome, and brought back a large number of books on sacred literature, which he had either bought at a price or received as gifts from his friends.

[...] he not long after made his fifth voyage from Britain to Rome, and returned **(as usual)** (MF) with an immense number of proper ecclesiastical relics. There were many sacred books pictures of the saints, as numerous as before. He also brought with him pictures out of our Lord’s history, which he hung round the chapel of Our Lady in the larger monastery,⁵⁸

This is an example of a cultural exchange of a great scope. The travels and actions of Benedict Biscop have resulted in the creation of Wearmouth-Jarrow, one of the greatest of the Anglo-Saxon monasteries. And this very monastery, among other significant works of art, has created the *Codex Amiatinus*⁵⁹, the greatest Bible of the Early Medieval world, which has been sent as a gift to the pope, but has never reached its destination, being now held in Florence. One can say that if all the books, relics and knowledge taken from Rome by Benedict Biscop were treated as a loan it has been thrice repaid.

There is another kind of travels that brought its special mark on the pattern of contact between the Anglo-Saxon England and Rome, namely the royal visits and pilgrimages. Caedwalla, king of Wessex, undertook the first significant one, after he abdicated in 689 and his road has taken him through

⁵⁶ Ibidem.

⁵⁷ <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/bede-jarrow.html> [26.03.2013].

⁵⁸ Ibidem.

⁵⁹ J. O’Reilly, *The Art of Authority*, in: *After Rome*, p. 154–159.

Samer near Calais (were he made some donations to the local monastery) and the court of Cunipert, king of the Lombards⁶⁰. His desire was to receive baptism at the hands of the pope, thus securing his way into heaven and he was granted his wish, after which he died 10 days later and was buried at St. Peter's⁶¹. He was supposed to be still 'in his baptismal robes'⁶².

Caedwalla is a perplexing figure – his name is British in origin⁶³ and he was on the one hand a fervent supporter of the Church and on the other a ruthless warrior⁶⁴. His decision to travel to Rome has been interpreted as a result of a serious wound he received shortly before he set out⁶⁵. It may be so, but nevertheless his dubious background and a decision, which closely emulates the practice of the first Christian emperors, point to a conscious attempt to take part in the very pattern of contact we are trying to describe here. His journey to Rome is symbolic in nature but it also sets a precedent. His successor, Ine, has decided to do exactly the same and abdicated, albeit after a much longer reign, and travelled to Rome in a hope of redeeming his soul. What is interesting here is that, in the words of Bede:

[...] [Ine] left his kingdom to younger men and went to the threshold of the apostles, while Gregory was pope, to spend some of his time upon earth as a pilgrim in the neighbourhood of the holy places [...]. At this time many Englishmen, nobles and commons, layfolk and clergy, men and women, were eager to do the same thing.⁶⁶

The events here, taking place in 726, were contemporary to Bede and he looks well informed. It is not necessary a proof of a widespread royal inspiration but certainly it shows that the pilgrimage to Rome was not something entirely extraordinary at the time. Afterwards kings travelled to Rome many times with Alfred visiting the holy city at least three times, first time still as a child⁶⁷. Those royal visits continued the existing pattern of contact and also stressed the notion of Rome being 'the Capital of the Anglo-Saxon England'.

The Holy Land and the Islamic World

The perception of the Holy Land in the Anglo-Saxon England was fundamentally in debt of Adomnán's work *De Locis Sanctis*, which was an account of the voyage of a Gallic monk Arculf, who shipwrecked on the coast of

⁶⁰ F.M. Stenton, op. cit., p. 70.

⁶¹ P. Hunter Blair, op. cit., p. 210–211; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* s. a. 688.

⁶² *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* s. a. 688.

⁶³ H. Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, University Park 1991, p. 31.

⁶⁴ F.M. Stenton, op. cit., p. 69.

⁶⁵ B. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England*, London 1997, p. 137.

⁶⁶ Bede, V, 7.

⁶⁷ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* s. a. 855.

Britain⁶⁸. The basis of the written account consisted of aforementioned *De Locis Sanctis* and the account of a voyage by Willibald, later on bishop of Eichstätt, written down by a nun named Hygeburg and inserted in the *Vita Willibaldi*⁶⁹. As the two areas and subjects are closely interwoven they will be discussed here together.

But the main research question to be posed here is not whether contacts or travels like these existed. It is rather: can we on the account of existing material and textual evidence include the Islamic World and the Holy Land in the pattern of contact? As one can see it has certainly existed very much in the communal consciousness of at least the elites and some of the members of the trading stratum.

Hygeburg describes in detail the way a pilgrim had to take in order to get to the Holy Land and although the endeavour is described as a solemn matter it is by no means considered impossible or extraordinary⁷⁰. It begins at the great emporium of the time, Hamwich, where the pilgrims embark on a probably Frisian merchant vessel, which takes them to the Continent, near Rouen. Later on their way is described with some detail together with their various adventures in the Holy Land⁷¹. The journey is full of perceptive accounts of Muslim life and minute detail. As *De lociis sanctis* it appears to be a genuine witness account, full of stunningly accurate descriptions of churches and holy places⁷².

Both authors are marvelled by what they see. But Arculf's account evidently often lacks the proper terminology and vocabulary to describe particular Muslim buildings, especially the mosques, as it is evident when he visits the all-important city of Damascus:

The king of the Saracens has seized the government, and reigns in that city, and a large church has been built there in honour of St. John Baptist. There has also been built, in that same city, **a church of unbelieving** (MF) Saracens, which they frequent.⁷³

⁶⁸ Adamnan's *De Locis Sanctis*, ed. D. Meehan, Dublin 1958.

⁶⁹ For an insightful study of this work and its author look: P. Head, *Who Is the Nun from Heidenheim? A Study of Hugeburc's Vita Willibaldi*, "Maedium Aevum" 2002, Vol. 71, No. 1 (Spr.), p. 29–46.

⁷⁰ *The Hodoeporicon of St. Willibad by Huneberc of Heidenheim* at <http://www.fordham.edu/HALSALL/basis/willibald.html> [20.03.2013].

⁷¹ I am indebted to the seminal work of Katherine Scarfe-Beckett, who has analysed both of those important account and provided with some most interesting conclusions, look: K. Scarfe-Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World*, Cambridge 2003.

⁷² The edition of *De lociis sanctis* present at the Colorado state University on-line repository reproduces some of the reconstructions made out of the text from the 1895 London edition, look: <http://faculty.colostate-pueblo.edu/beatrice.spade/seminar97/arculf/arculfus.htm> [20.03.2013].

⁷³ <http://faculty.colostate-pueblo.edu/beatrice.spade/seminar97/arculf/arculfus.htm> [22.04.2013].

On the other occasion he names the Muslim place of worship *orationis domus*, a house of prayer⁷⁴. Arculf seems to treat Islam as unimportant, almost as a passing matter, which just for a certain time changes the cultural landscape of the Holy Land⁷⁵. But on the other hand, Hygeburg's account is written from an entirely different perspective, almost accepting the Islamic presence⁷⁶.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle supplies us with account of three more voyages of this type in 884, 1052 and 1058, made respectively by two anonymous pilgrims, Swein, the son of Godwin and archbishop Ealdred of York⁷⁷. The last two are well beyond the chronological scope of this work.

But all this textual and literary references give us exceptional accounts, which can only place the Holy Land and the Islamic World in the mentality of the Anglo-Saxons in England, through the way of reception of those texts and oral accounts of those voyages⁷⁸. Let us turn then on to the material evidence, expressed chiefly by coins.

The most vivid example of such a coin was indeed not minted in the Arab World. It is the so-called 'dinar of Offa', found in Italy but most certainly stuck in England. It is a copy of 'Abbâsid dinar of al-Mansur from A.D. 774 and it also bears the inscription 'Offa Rex' in Latin script. It might be interpreted, as it was found in Italy, as a part of tribute paid to the pope – with Islamic currency treated as the most reliable form of money it would have raised the status of the payment⁷⁹. But this interpretation is not necessarily correct: the coin might have been a kind of gift-item, which would not be treated simply in the means of payment⁸⁰. The first interpretation would have proved Kufic coins found in England, like the two dinars from Eastbourne in Sussex from A.D. 724-743⁸¹ to be traces of trade. The second one might point towards their status as gift-items, luxury proofs of status or a secure and well-recognised way to accommodate wealth.

The findings of Arabic coins in England before the period of Viking invasions are scarce, but they have their renaissance afterwards, by virtue of trade routes from Scandinavia to the Middle East⁸². Those coins, found in hoards as well as in individual finds should by all means be interpreted as

⁷⁴ K. Scarfe-Beckett, op. cit., p. 45.

⁷⁵ Ibidem, p. 46.

⁷⁶ Ibidem.

⁷⁷ Ibidem, p. 53.

⁷⁸ Although the reception of Hygeburg's work has been put in question in one of the reviews of Scarfe-Beckett's work: Ch. Burnett, *Katharine Scarfe Beckett, Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World*, "The Journal of Religion" 2005, Vol. 85, No. 3 (Jul.), p. 523.

⁷⁹ A. Petersen, *The archaeology of Islam in Britain: recognition and potential*, "Antiquity" 2008, Vol. 82, No. 382 (Dec.), p. 1081.

⁸⁰ A. Cutler, *Gifts and Gift Exchange as Aspects of the Byzantine, Arab, and Related Economies*, "Dumbarton Oaks Papers" 2001, Vol. 55, p. 274, footnote 151.

⁸¹ K. Scarfe-Beckett, op. cit., p. 55.

⁸² A. Petersen, op. cit., p. 1081–1082.

results of trade, albeit almost certainly indirect. The Viking period lies on the outskirts of the chronological scope of this work, yet by then certainly the Islamic World constituted a part of the pattern of contact, however indirectly.

The materials imported to England from the Arabic World start even in the pre-Islamic era as grave goods. There is a whole array of materials – ranging from the medical components mentioned in *Bald's Leechbook* and *Lacunga* to silks and spices⁸³. All of those materials probably came to England indirectly, through various intermediaries: at the beginning it could have been Frisians, later on the Vikings.

From this we can draw the following conclusions: the goods from the Islamic World certainly existed and are well attested in the Anglo-Saxon England; Islamic coinage was present in Anglo-Saxon England, though probably (but not necessarily) through the help of intermediaries; Offa's imitation of a dinar might have served as a powerful gift-item and not necessarily an element of a monetised economy; the Holy Land founded a part of a mental focal point of the patterns of contact – the travels there were by no means extremely rare endeavours and, especially in the later period, might have happened quite frequently; nevertheless the main role of the Holy Land in the pattern of contact was in the field of mentality; the Islamic World was present in the pattern of contact mainly through intermediaries; the question whether the exact prominence of artefacts and materials imported from this sphere were known to the English at this period remains open; all those doubts do not, however, exclude the Islamic World from the pattern of contact

Emporia?

At the end of this article we turn to the emporia. The purpose of this sub-section is not to make a list, an archaeological gazetteer of sites and to evaluate the role of those sites, as this would only create an enumeration of names with ever-repeating lists of imports and exports. Rather let us look into the relation between the emporia and the pattern of contact and whether really the emporia were so all-powerful elements of it.

Richard Hodges brought the term into the scholarly discourse about the period⁸⁴ and has spurred quite a discussion by scholars⁸⁵ and by the author himself⁸⁶. Hodges has postulated that the economy of the Dark Ages was

⁸³ K. Scarfe-Beckett, *op. cit.*, p. 63–68.

⁸⁴ R. Hodges, *Dark Age Economics. The Origins of Towns and Trade A.D. 600–1000*, New York 1982.

⁸⁵ R. Samson, *Illusory emporia and mad economic theories*, in: *Anglo-Saxon Trading Centres: Beyond the Emporia*, ed. M. Anderton, Glasgow 1999.

⁸⁶ R. Hodges, *Dark Age Economics. A New Audit*, London 2010.

centred on the *emporia* – trading communities of two major types A and B. The type A were seasonal trading places, where merchants met at particular times and type B were permanent settlements. In Hodges' system everything evolved around those settlements, which in turn were controlled by various levels of royal authority.

Thence, when we look at his theory, the Dark Age economics (including its name, where deliberately the Early Middle Ages are named rather anachronistically) appears to be some kind of Marxist, state (or rather royal) controlled system, with designated places for international trade. In this dystopian vision also the pattern of contact would be relying on some authority consent. If this were to be true, it would have been a rather gloomy world in an urgent need of a revolution.

The main argument used against Hodges thesis was that he ignored the existence and role of numerous other economic settlements: towns, cities, royal vils – in other words he seemed to ignore the existence of the whole industrial hinterland⁸⁷. This understanding of the *emporia* system is, of course, impossible to accept.

The pattern of contact on the material level encompasses both the hinterland, understood as the body of the country and the *emporia*, which are gates to this hinterland – windows through which the trade and travels are made. By no means are they all-powerful centres and emanations of royal powers. This understanding is supported by the modern view of one of the greatest *emporia* of Anglo-Saxon England – Hamwic. Recent re-evaluation of this important Early Medieval site shows that this was not a consolidated settlement but rather a buzzing area in constant transition where various settlements changed their interactions with each other and with the outside world⁸⁸. A similar situation occurs in York.

The royal control was also not so strong and what did Hodges take as an almost all-powerful system might have just been an example of administrative efficiency⁸⁹.

All in all the *emporia* system had of course a profound importance in the pattern of contact. Firstly it helped to preserve continuity in a variety of ways. In question of sites like York and London it was a continuity of settlement – the favourable conditions of the former Roman sites connected with the possible interaction with the indigenous population helped to carry on the occupation of those places. Hamwic is a specific example with occupation stretching maybe as far as the Iron Age. But most importantly, because the *emporia* were sometimes situated away from the former places of settle-

⁸⁷ R. Samson, *Illusory emporia and mad economic theories*, in: *Anglo-Saxon Trading Centres*, p. 82–87.

⁸⁸ A. Morton, *Hamwic in its context*, in: *Anglo-Saxon Trading Centres: Beyond the Emporia*, ed. M. Anderton, Glasgow 1999, p. 48–49.

⁸⁹ N. Middleton, *Early medieval port customs*, “Early Medieval Europe” 2005, Vol. 13, No. 4, p. 350.

ment, they helped to preserve the trade routes and ways of travel on the both sides of the Channel. Places like Dorestad and Hamwic maintained the routes, which were centuries old.

Secondly the emporia allowed increased maritime activity. As safe havens they provides place for merchants but mainly they created zones of exchange around them in which both industrial and trade activity could be conducted. In an economy, which could not sustain large cities, this was of profound importance.

To conclude this short sketch on the problem of emporia one must say that the question mark in the title must be retained. Not because the existence of those sites is dubious or their role in the patter of contact, but because their character was not that of a single, constant settlement. Rather they evolved and changed and thus we must constantly adapt our definition and understanding of the term to the new findings and new interpretations.

The analysis presented in this article shows, that the 'pattern of contact' was a constantly changing collection of trade routes, pilgrim roads, adventurers travels and power links that not only played an important role in the economy, but also helped to define the very meaning of the Anglo-Saxon world.